

## **“Why do Catholics call Mary the Mother of God?”**

At times, people get the impression that the title of “Mother of God” puts Mary on the same level of God or even superior to God. How could Mary be the Mother of the one who has existed before all eternity? What we mean when we say Mother of God is not that Mary gave birth to God – who is eternal and has no birth, no beginning nor end. Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ, who is God. The Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit have always existed. Long before Mary ever existed, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed. In time, however, the Son was born into our world, and was born of the human Mary. There was a huge debate about this matter in the early Church, especially surrounding the Nestorian Heresy, which claimed that Mary only gave birth to the human aspect of Jesus, and not the divine aspect. Catholics and most other Christians teach that when Jesus was born of Mary he was both fully God and fully human. This is very important on many levels, but to simplify for the sake of a page-long article, unless Jesus was both fully God and fully human, we are not redeemed.

So, in sum, as Catholics we do *not* believe that at some point in the dim past, before the stars and planets were formed, Mary appeared and gave birth to God. What we believe when we say that Mary is the Mother of God is that two thousand years ago, by God’s will the Son was born of Mary and that the little baby that she gave birth to was both God and man. Virtually all Christians believe in these facts, it is simply the title “Mother of God” that gets certain Christians all stirred up. Some are upset that we give Mary any recognition whatsoever. But why is that upsetting? We aren’t calling her a goddess. We aren’t giving her any more honor than God himself has given her in choosing her as the mother of his Son. The Holy Bible itself states of Mary that “All generations will call me blessed.” (Luke 1:48) If that is the case, then are we wrong in giving her honor? Are we being unbiblical? It is good for us as Catholics to be able to address these issues as many of those who have a problem with the honor we show Mary are simply unfamiliar with what we teach and being unfamiliar makes walls go up when they really don’t have to.

Speaking of making people uncomfortable, did you know that Mary is the only woman mentioned by name in the Koran (the Scriptures of Islam). In fact, she is mentioned in the Koran quite often and is the most important woman in the Muslim faith. The Koran states, “Behold! the angels said: “O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee – chosen thee above the women of all nations.” It claims that Mary was dedicated to God at birth by her mother and that, under the protection of Zachariah, she lived in the temple and was miraculously provided food by God. She is given various titles by Islam, “The Purified One”, “The Exalted One”, “The Keeper of Chastity”, “She who was Chosen”, “Queen of the Saints”, etc. The Koran explains that Mary was a virgin and gave birth to Jesus by the power of God, but it also teaches that Jesus was not divine (which we, obviously, would not agree with).

## **“Isn’t praying in a repetitive manner like you do when you pray the Rosary condemned by Jesus in Matthew 6:7?”**

First of all, let’s look at that verse and what exactly it says. “In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” (Mat 6:7-8) The King James version is similar: “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” What is being condemned is praying in an unthinking, undevout way in which we think that simply because we are doing X God will do Y for us. It’s important to know what the Gospel means when it claims that the Pagans were babbling in their prayer. Many Pagan beliefs of that time had the idea that the gods had to be appeased to keep them happy – so that people could go about their lives untroubled by the gods’ wrath. Appeasing the gods was done either through sacrifices or through reciting formulas. For many pagans these prayer formulas had to be recited exactly or they would not work. If a pagan priest mispronounced a word or left out a word or some other mistake, he would have to go back to the very beginning and start all over again. So this was a sort of mechanical way of praying that sought to achieve a certain benefit from God. The aim is to say the words right, and not to say them with meaning or heart.

The prayer of the Rosary is not “vain repetitions” – which simply means to pray in an empty way. The Rosary does include a lot of repetition – but is it empty? Is it meaningless? Is it simply saying something over and over again because we want God to hear it? Perhaps when some people pray the Rosary it is vain repetition, but that certainly isn’t the case for everyone. When some people pray the Lord’s Prayer they do it in an empty and meaningless way, but that is not the case for everybody. The same is true for praying over our meals or even spontaneous prayer – people can say it in a heartless, mindless way in which they think that simply by saying certain words they can achieve some good. This is what the Lord condemns.

The Rosary can be prayed with great devotion and can be a powerful reflection on the life of Christ. I have known people who have turned their lives around by making the Rosary their daily practice. This prayer seems especially powerful in combating the ever increasing problem of pornography addiction.

Some final points to remember when talking about the Rosary with people – especially those who might be critical of it. Is praying the Rosary necessary for salvation? No. Can the praying of the Rosary make a person’s spiritual life more rich? Yes. Is the Rosary the right prayer for everyone? Not necessarily. Can the Rosary bring a person closer to Jesus Christ? Most definitely.

## **“Why do Catholics pray to Mary and the Saints?”**

First of all, when we say we pray to Mary, we are not praying to Mary or the Saints in the same way we pray to God. God is the source of all things and of all good. The Saints and Mary are mere creatures of God, and are not divine. When we say we “pray” to Mary and the Saints, it is more like we are asking for their help – specifically their prayers. It is not wrong to ask for someone to help you, in the same way we don’t think that it is wrong to ask for a saint to help us. To get to a proper understanding on why we “Pray” to the saints, you have to follow a progression of thought: A) Prayer works; B) The prayers of people who are holy are more effective than those who are unholy or just so-so; C) People can pray for each other; D) The saints in heaven pray; E) Those in heaven care about the rest of us. So let’s take each of these points separately.

A. Prayer works – I think most people who are religious, no matter what they profess believe in the truth of this statement, so you can usually get people to agree with this point right off.

B. The prayer of the Holy is better – This is straight from the Bible: “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful. Elijah was a human being like us; yet he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain upon the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the earth produced its fruits” (James 5:16-18) or “The Lord is far from the wicked, but the prayer of the just he hears” (Proverbs 15:29).

C. We should pray for each other – Also, right from the Bible “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

D. The Saints in heaven pray – “And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar before the throne; and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God” (Rev. 8:3–4). Furthermore, the saints are not “dead” but very much alive. As Christ himself tells us: “As for the dead being raised, have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God told him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” (Mark 12:26-27) This passage pointed out to his listeners that God spoke to Moses of the long dead patriarchs in the present tense, meaning they were still very much his followers, still very much alive but in a different sense.

E. Those in Heaven care about us. First of all, it’s a given that God, who is in heaven, cares for us. Next, it seems the angels are somewhat interested in us as well, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father”(Matthew 18:10). So if there is this connection between God and his people and God’s angels and his people, it is not difficult to make the connection that the rest of those in heaven also have a bond with those who are still living. And we see this in the results of their prayers for us, and the miracles the saints, by their prayers to God, work in our own lives.

Again, a lot of the problems that non-Catholics have with our devotion to the saints stems from misunderstands and misinformation. Do we worship dead people like gods? NO. Do we think that God is not the source of all that is good? NO. Do we believe that God also uses his people (both on earth and in heaven) to enact his goodness in the world and to care for each other? YES!